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Better Your Bridge

Better Your Bridge

By

Charles C. Plaat



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Preface

Back in 1930 I wrote and published a thesis on contract bridge entitled *Winning Ways in Contract Bridge*. It was one of the first booklets on the game, and came out before Culbertson's first *Blue Book* appeared.

A great many lengthy volumes by the foremost players and leading exponents of the game have since seen the light. Almost all of these books on bridge have dealt principally with certain bidding systems and conventions. Exceptions are books actually devoted to card playing, among which Watson's *Play of the Hand* is in my opinion the most outstanding. A splendid book it is, indeed, which should be read and studied by all players who wish to improve their game.

We cannot deny that all these various bidding conventions, if thoroughly understood by the partnership, are commendable and offer a starting point for the beginner, and a basis on which to develop one's game.

In fifteen years of play and comparison, making good use of our own experience, we have made our own deductions, and wherever I go I seldom hear a player say: "Partner, I play Culbertson—or Sims—or the Four Aces."

When Mr. Culbertson wrote a lot, the masses followed. They all played "Culbertson" as a matter of good taste. When Mr. Sims came out with "Money Bridge" it was stylish and up-to-date to swing over to that system at once, and when the "Four Aces" made its appearance, who would have dared to do anything else but try to master that system.

It would be an injustice not to make mention, right here, of George Reith's "One-Over-One," the main principle of which has served as a foundation to all approach bidding systems. Here I would repeat what I said in those early years, "**One must admit that anybody with an average brain could learn any given bidding system in a few days or a week.**" So, if you cannot rise above the learned lessons of how to pour your card holding into the mould of the system, you will never rise above the very mediocre, and your knowledge will be no more than that of the other several millions of bridge players with the one week's study of a system.

This I was convinced of in the early stages of the game. I advocated caution in adopting a pet system, because sooner or later the brainy player would follow the sound underlying principles of card valuation from his own experience, adding a variety of offensive and defensive bids, according to ever-changing situations with which he is confronted in rubber bridge.

It is a great relief, now, to come to the table and hear no one express himself as playing any of the above-mentioned systems, and it speaks well for the intelligence of the American bridge player that he has learned for himself what I so boldly predicted in the early days.

One speaks no more of bidding systems, but certain conventions (alas! it has to be) have survived and taken deep root: the strong no-trump original bid, the Blackwood slam convention, the no-trump response to the bid of one or two of a suit, the double for a take-out, and an occasional one-club opening bid which must be kept open.

To sum up, there is no market for a new bidding system today. The general public has dropped systems like cigarette lighters. Both are hard to keep working. Both have lost their commercial value.

Wouldn't it seem, therefore, that this is the right time to formulate a compact book, dealing in a simple and understandable way with the contract bridge problems of today—a guide to the beginner, and the more advanced

player as well—a method of meeting the thousands and thousands of experienced players of today and successfully swapping one's skill with the other fellow's?

In this endeavor my thoughts and advice will be focused only upon the game of contract bridge as it was finally arrived at and formulated after various preliminary stages of whist, Boston whist, bridge, and auction bridge—the rubber game for money, however small the stake; how to win the most points, or lose the fewest, with the cards one holds.

In striving to create competitive matches, which could be played by several teams at a time, one arrived at the present form of duplicate bridge, which differs in so many respects from the rubber game that it could not be treated as the same game in this book.

It is too bad that competitive skill could not be determined by having judges award points for each bid and play upon its individual merits, over a certain length of time, so that the good and the bad and the excellent and the master points might be awarded for players of the original game of contract bridge.

I reckon that one would need more judges than players—at least two behind each player. That couldn't be done, and the game had to be changed and modified in many ways. Or rather one had to make another game out of it, and arrived at duplicate or tournament bridge, with another code of rules and regulations. It is a makeshift, the nearest thing to correct comparison one could find—with that *one weak spot* forever remaining—one bids and plays the same hands, but *against different opponents*.

Before starting my first chapter on card valuation and bidding I shall devote a few lines to this all-important phase of the game.

Concentration

There is no expert player who can teach you that, there is no bidding system written touching upon it. But I do, because I actually have in mind telling you how to play a winning game and, take it from me, fifty per cent of the points lost by the beginner and partly advanced player are due to lack of concentration. This means that you have it in your own power to improve your game at once.

Tonight, if you please, without taking a single lesson, without reading a single word out of any bidding system, just do what I tell you to do :

Now this, as the first advice to the beginner and inexperienced player : Keep your own score ; make sure it tallies with the other scores on the table. Look at that score, and look again, before you make your declaration. And when it becomes your turn to bid the next time, first look again : you may have forgotten.

Do not make insufficient bids. If in doubt, ask what the last declaration was and, remember, you are entitled at any time during the bidding to ask for a re-

view of the bidding, with the honest intention of refreshing your memory.

Do not bid or pass out of turn: all you have to do is to watch and concentrate.

Do not lead out of the wrong hand. Isn't it easy to know where you took the last trick? If you cannot remember, *ask*; you have that right.

Before starting to make an initial lead, make sure it is your turn to play. It will cost you points if you don't.

To renege in a suit is a dead loss. Look twice, and make sure you have seen all your cards.

Doesn't the following come straight under the heading of non-concentration? You have overcalled a bid by your opponent. They stop at a bid under game. You overcall again, without the prospect of you or your partner doubling their next game bid, or going any further with your own bidding. Result: another loss.

Really, too many times bids and plays are made by careless players which cost them many points, and when attention to that is called by the partner, the excuse is always the same: "You don't need to tell me, I know all about it, simply didn't think," or "Pure carelessness." Well then, here is another thing that bidding systems or lessons failed to prevent. You have it entirely within your own power to correct this, if not entirely, surely to a great extent. It is lack of concentration, nothing else.

I furthermore strongly advise you not to be without a copy of *The Laws of Contract Bridge, 1943*,* Authorized Edition printed and published by The John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

When a penalty is called against you, accept it gracefully. Do not feel as if somebody is offending you. You are the offender and, by adhering to the rules with a smile, you will soon commence to enjoy the game much better.

The laws of the game are fair and explicit and eliminate lengthy disputes.

Quoting the first two paragraphs on page 15:

The Scope of the Laws

The Laws are designed to define correct procedure and to provide an adequate remedy in all cases where a player accidentally, carelessly or inadvertently disturbs the proper course of the game, or gains an unintentional but nevertheless unfair advantage.

The object of the proprieties is twofold —to familiarize players with the customs and etiquette of the game, generally accepted over a long period of years—and to enlighten those who might otherwise fail to appreciate when or how they are improperly conveying information to their partners—often a far more reprehensible offense than a violation of the law.

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While the bidding or play is in progress, don't be distracted and hope that the time will come when you will need special concentration only for complicated situations, and can do the rest more or less automatically.

Once more, no bidding system or newly invented convention will save you. The first and all-important stage of becoming a winning player lies with you.

Now I would suggest that the next time you play the game, you be your own teacher and give yourself the first lesson in how to concentrate and repeat a few times until you have really learned to concentrate, and now notice the remarkable improvement in your point score, and see how close I came when I mentioned cutting your losing points in half, and what a satisfaction it is not to be caught in these unnecessary offenses.

I believe it has already greatly strengthened your self-confidence and the respect of your partner and your adversaries. It has done something all around; you took a spring tonic, and you don't feel that wobbly sensation as before.

Conventions

At the time when contract bridge commenced to take the place of auction, one almost immediately began to feel the lack of means to express the value of one's cards to the partner. This was true, not only for the opening bid but especially so for the assisting bids and rebids leading to game or slam declarations and, in part defensively, for the purpose of doubling the adversaries.

One writer, Milton Work, the best-known and most widely followed of that period, placed a point value on the honor cards from ace to jack, giving an ace 4 points, a king 3, a queen 2, and a jack 1.

A certain number of points, in this case perhaps 13, were required for an opening bid, so many for an assist, so many for a rebid, etc., always bearing in mind and expressing these values in biddable suits and assisting cards in partner's color.

It wasn't a bad start at all, and I know players who still use it in no trump declarations. It was without doubt a step in the right direction, but it lacked the flexibility of partnership language in coping with distribution, the certainty about top tricks, and con-

sequently provided only vague guidance in doubling the adversaries' contract.

We then came to the gradual development of valuing opening bids, further early bids, and assists, by quick tricks or honor tricks, aces and kings, which were fairly sure of producing first- and second-round tricks, giving queens and jacks, in combination with other cards, additional values. These are designated more precisely in a table of quick-trick values, later to follow in these pages.

One of the outstanding figures in these days was Mr. Wilbur Whitehead. Now, whether this quick-trick valuation method was slowly and gradually developed by a coterie of players who used to gather at the good old Knickerbocker Whist Club, with Whitehead in their midst, or whether Mr. Whitehead conceived of it alone and unassisted, we shall not question. A fact it is that Mr. Whitehead wrote several books on contract, based upon his table of quick-trick valuations. It became then, and has been ever since, the fundamental guide used in all bidding systems, even though they may show slight variations in fractional values.

George Reith did a lot to perfect the more or less guessing tactics of Whitehead, and it was finally Mr. Ely Culbertson who, as the game was played and left its marks of experience, presented the bridge world with a rich variety of masterly written books which, in conciseness of system and mathematical conception, by far outdid everything else in volume and style.

But, regardless of all this, the quick-trick or honor-trick count is the only method up to now which may really be called the all-important factor in determining the trick-taking potentialities of a bridge hand—provided that the later stages of bidding are carefully executed according to distribution and intervening bids around the table.

Also, and this is very important, when a decision is to be made, whether a double of adversary's bid would be profitable, a far more accurate calculation is possible because your partner, through his initial or early bids, has told you how many first- or second-round tricks, if any, you may count on in his hand offensively as well as defensively.

Mr. R. F. Foster, who devoted much time to card mathematics, discovered what is called "the Rule of Eleven." Very ingenious, very interesting. At first it was unanimously adopted by all bridge players, but in later years it proved of not too much value because it gives the same information to the adversary as it does to the partner.

Mr. F. M. Benecke, of Oxford, England, is also a claimant to the discovery of the Rule of Eleven, but it seems that Mr. Foster came first in 1889.

The so-called Rule of Eleven applies as follows: The fourth highest of a suit is led. Subtract the denomination of this card from eleven. The result is the total number of cards, higher than the card led, held by the three other players.

Example: Your partner leads the 7. 7 from 11 is 4. There are four cards to beat the 7 spot. You see one card of that suit in the open dummy which can beat it. You have one of the suit in your own hand to beat it, which makes two. So the other two cards to beat the 7 are held in declarer's hand. Another example: The 6 of a suit is played by your partner. 6 from 11 is 5. You see in the dummy two cards to beat the 6. In your own hand you have three cards to beat it. 2 plus 3 is 5. The closed hand (declarer) cannot beat the 6 spot.

No other player, teacher or writer has given us anything else new about a deck of cards. They have merely shown us how they would build up their bids around the honor trick values and distribution, interspersed with certain conventions.

Yes, conventions we must have. The public loves them, and they are good sellers. It surprises me that we haven't another fifty or sixty to work with. Who will be the genius to get up the universal bidding code? Twelve million code words for each combination of 13 cards. Then will follow the automatic play indicator and electric dealer, and we won't have to use our brains at all—in fact, we will save time and energy, and play backgammon or read the paper while we are pushing the buttons. Or perhaps, in this machine age, we don't have to be present at all, but merely indicate by 'phone which side we wish to play.

It is my opinion that all these artificial conventions in the bidding spoil this beautiful game of bridge.

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They take the guessing out of the game, they are deadly sure and uninteresting. They offer no advantage in the end, because the adversaries use them too. They only dull the card brain, and they discourage individual skill.

Please follow me: When I talk about artificial conventions, I do not mean conventional bids, which we all follow instinctively. I mean a natural way of approach bidding, whereby we hope to arrive at the correct contract or, when the bidding has entered a defensive stage, to accept such reasonable penalties as to offset the gains which the other side would have made had we not interfered with their bidding.

Bidding

Correct and successful contract bidding is the co-ordination of twenty-six partnership cards. Correct contract bidding is co-operative bidding. *Partnership bidding* is the exchange of information and inferences between the partnership.

The art of bidding rests in the interchange of information between the partners which will insure the hand's being played in the best make of the twenty-six partnership cards. Successful bidding is precise bidding. Hence over-bidding and under-bidding are equally objectionable and expensive.

Correct valuation and exact estimate of the trick-taking potentialities of the hand are necessary not only when employed on the offensive, but correspondingly valuable when the hand is to be played at defense. After the bidding has been opened one is continuously confronted with the problem: "Shall I go on—or shall I pass—or would it not be more profitable to double the opponents?" And the mutual mirroring of the partnership hands will generally furnish the correct answer.

Every time a hand is played, thirteen tricks are

made by the four players. The question for you to answer when you analyze your hand for bidding is: How many of these tricks can you and your partner take?

The first basis of calculation—the starting point—is to assume that each of the four players holds approximately an even share of the thirteen tricks. This would give each player three tricks and each side six tricks, with an odd trick floating about the board somewhere. A good many hands are rightly passed out because, with a fairly even distribution of the suits and probable tricks, it is difficult to determine which side would tip the beam and score the odd trick. When, however, your holdings seem to be above the average (that is if you hold $2\frac{1}{2}$ quick tricks) and give reasonable assurance of producing four or more probable tricks (your normal share is $3\frac{1}{4}$, theoretically, of course), you announce this prospect to your partner by making a bid of one, either in a suit or no-trump. You base this bid of one equally on the reasonable expectancy, "normal expectancy" it is generally called, of finding the remaining outstanding tricks equally divided among the other three players, which would give your side seven tricks—four in your own hand and three in your partner's hand. These seven partnership tricks constitute the one-odd which you have named in your declaration of one.

This is the whole mathematical basis of the game in a nutshell. It is necessary that $2\frac{1}{2}$ of the four tricks

shall be found in honor cards which are practically certain to win tricks on the first or second round. These honor tricks are not only necessary to develop the probable tricks in the hand, but they also form a sound basis for your partner to build upon either offensively or defensively.

With an even distribution of the suits—balanced distribution, it is called—such as 4-3-3-3 or 4-4-3-2 (also frequently labeled “no-trump distribution”) it is better to bid no-trump.

With unbalanced distribution, 5-5-2-1 or 5-4-3-1 or 5-4-2-2 the suit bid is preferable.

In case of a void suit, singleton or worthless doubleton (unbalanced distribution) the suit bid is generally preferable.

A mistaken idea of the inexperienced player is that a singleton or worthless doubleton is an asset in the declarer's hand. Only in partner's hand is such the case, if enough small trumps are held to ruff missing suit.

Quick-Trick Valuation

(x indicates any card smaller than the 10)

	Q.T.
AK	2
AQ	$1\frac{1}{2}$
KQJ	$1\frac{1}{2}$
A	1
KQ	1
Kx	$\frac{1}{2}$

THE PARTNER'S ASSISTS

In assisting partner's suit bid of 1 to 2, at least four probable tricks (one over normal expectancy) are required, including normal trump support. By normal trump support is meant three trumps, headed by at least a queen or four small trumps.

In the event that only three trumps are held in the assisting hand, you should be careful to ascertain whether the opening bid is at least a five-card suit before going too far with your assists. If you have sufficient outside strength (and hold only three trumps) and no other biddable suit, it is advisable to take out first in no-trump. This will give declarer a chance to show whether he is strong or weak in trumps. If he rebids his trump suit in the face of your no-trump

denial, you are then justified in assisting his suit, because he has practically told you that he is all but independent of your trump support. Again, if you are short in trumps and hold another biddable suit, it is important that you show such suit by bidding it. It is always preferable to show another biddable suit, rather than deny with no-trump. Further assisting bids are made according to strength in excess of normal expectancy, one raise for each further trick you think your hand will produce either in actual quick tricks or by ruffing in your hand. It is of great importance that an immediate raise should be made according to the full limit of the hand.

The response of one in no-trump to the partner's original bid of one is generally accepted today to mean, "Partner, I have very little assist in anything—perhaps one king and one queen, or quite a few intermediate cards. I am keeping the bidding open for you and, in case your hand is very strong, you may wish to go further on your own hook."

During the bidding period, you must not miss your opportunity to double opponents' overcalls and so-called push bids, if your good judgment tells you that such will net you greater profit than by going on with your own bidding. It will, in many instances, disclose your distribution to your partner even better than making a further bid of your own.

THIRD AND FOURTH HAND BIDS

Up to this point, we have been discussing opening bids by first and second hands only, together with partner's responses. It is, or should be obvious, that third or fourth hands require additional strength on account of the weakness indicated by the partner's passes. Also it is not good strategy to open the bidding late unless reasonably certain that you can get somewhere, and with a passing partner you can't look for much help from him.

DECLARER'S REBIDS

In rebidding, after partner's assist, take-out, or pass, the opening bidder should be governed by additional values in excess of the $2\frac{1}{2}$ quick tricks announced in his first declaration. Holding additional values, he should raise the contract one, and leave it up to the partner to bid game. This assumes that the declarer's holdings were not such as to justify the game bid himself and he requires additional values from his partner to justify game declaration. In the event that the opening bid was made on a strong hand, declarer should bid for game himself and not depend further on the partner, as the latter may not have additional values to show, and a game-going hand would be passed out. When the partner has taken out in some other suit or no-trump, assist the take-out if possible. If you cannot assist the take-out and

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you have a secondary suit to show, you should by all means bid it.

CHOICE BETWEEN NO-TRUMP AND A MAJOR

When the suit distribution is normal (balanced distribution) and there is a choice between a suit and a no-trump, *even a major suit*, it is generally best to play the hand at no-trump which requires only three-odd for the game. But the basic principle of the approach system of bidding in contract is to declare suit bids as often as possible and as early as possible, so that high honor cards and distribution may be ascertained quickly and correctly and, four-card suits having top honors, are mentioned originally and in the course of the bidding, the same as five-card suits. No-trump overcalls are usually given as a sign of minimum strength and to discourage further suit bidding.

VALUE OF PART SCORE

At all times do not lose sight of the fact that a part score is a big asset at contract bridge, and an over-trick or two will never harm your final score. So do not make the too common mistake, when assisting your partner, of over-bidding when you are almost positive that the bid is not in the hand but, "on account of not being vulnerable, you thought you might just as well take a chance and try for game, for after all a set

of 50 or 100 points is not material." That is very poor reasoning.

THE SEMI-FORCING SYSTEM

Eliminating the Artificial Two Club Bid

To the simple approach system of bidding already used in auction by smart players, there has been added the forcing principle at contract in order to provide that strong hands will not be passed out before game or slam declaration is reached. The underlying principle of the forcing system is that certain exceptionally strong hands, which seem to be labeled as game-going hands or better, should not have to be bid in such a way as to shut out the partner from giving information as to his hand first. There is a chance for the original bidder to rebid so that a final declaration may be arrived at which is the best suitable for the two combined hands.

By biddable suits we mean a suit consisting of four or more cards, headed by some honor strength, the honor strength to be very important in suits of four. The longer suits will warrant compensation in length for lesser honor strength. This theory is very simple and one doesn't have to play cards very long to find out in practice what it means.

For the beginner we insert the following examples:

A suit of four cards, consisting of ace, queen, jack, and ten, must produce three tricks with a possible

maximum of four. A suit of four cards, consisting of king, jack, nine, and seven, may not produce a single trick if the top honors are held on the left—and may produce one, or at most two tricks if ace and queen are held on the right of the player. A suit of four cards, consisting of queen, jack, ten, and nine, must produce two sure tricks.

In the case of a five-suiter, the possibilities of making the lower spots count become much greater, and all these theories are based, of course, on more or less even distribution around the table.

When six or more in the same trump suit are held (again assuming that the suit is fairly evenly divided among the players), the suit is led two or three times, and your deuce or three-spot becomes of just as much value as the ace or king because you had a chance of eliminating the high cards together in a few rounds.

To make the point very clear, and as an extreme example: If you hold ten trump cards, from the jack down, and you lead the deuce or any other card, and the other three trumps are equally divided among the other three players—one holding the ace, the other the king, and the third the queen—your remaining trump cards are all good, and you have made nine tricks out of ten trumps, missing the ace, king, and queen.

In the assisting hand a little length, of at least four cards or more, in the partner's trump declaration, is of such great value for the same reason as described above. In the long run you will find that four cards,

consisting of the deuce, three, four, and five, are much more useful than two, even if they were ace and king.

If strong trump support (not unusual length) is held in responding hand, and poor side suits, the combined hands will very often show up as trump poor, and strength in other suit than the trump suit will often be more valuable to support the partner.

Do not forget at any time that we are on the subject of *offensive bidding* (the stage during which you are in the driver's seat) and talk to each other in the hope and belief that your side is going to win the contract and play in a suit or declaration suited to your combined cards.

If you have to give up the ship, and you have to concede the final contract to the opponents, you will now realize that the hand which looked so big to you, when you were going to play it in spades, has lost 90 per cent of its power while your opponent is playing it in hearts. In other words, your top tricks (honor tricks) are the only ones which are effective now, except in some exceptional cases, when you and your partner have been able to eliminate the declarer's trumps entirely by compulsory ruffing, and have set up your own cards out of a long suit which will take tricks in the end.

This carries us back to the original explanation of expressing values in first round or top honor tricks, which will produce tricks defensively as well as offensively.

And right here, where mention is made of defensive and offensive play, it would be my great satisfaction to have the bridge-playing public look into this matter a little closer. It is my observation that the mediocre and average player knows too little about defensive bidding, so that, in the exchanges, he often comes out on the short end against his more versatile and clever opponent. By the short end, I mean when he winds up with a part score bid when game declaration should have been reached, when he plays the hand in the wrong suit, when he lets his opponent get away with too small a penalty, instead of going on with his own bidding.

And, above all, learn to mix a semi-defensive style of bidding with your early rounds of offensive bidding, at least until you are quite sure that your side is in the driver's seat, and is going to have the last word. Big hands, having the earmarks of game or more, don't need any early defensive precaution. They don't need any veiling as to weak spots, or mediocre honor strength for fear of being outbid.

I realize, while writing, how difficult it is to explain correctly and simply how to go about this. It sounds almost like a crude contradiction of correct bidding and partnership language, but the fact is that expert players all use these tactics and deviate frequently from the beaten path and the systems they wrote themselves. There is no set rule for it. It cannot

be taken up in a bidding system; it must be a knack, something that one instinctively does better than the other. This veiling or camouflaging of mediocre or minimum-strength hands should be conducted in such a way as to have the partner less puzzled by it than the opponents. And beware of the partner who knows only one thing—offensive bidding. He may unintentionally disclose his cards for the two opponents to appraise and then conduct their own campaign. Beware of the partner who never heard of a defense prepared before the blow, or rather a defense which prevented the blow from being struck at all.

After you have hampered the advance of the opponents a dozen times, and have saved innumerable points, and you finally fall in once for a set of 700, this same partner will immediately tell you that he cannot see the sense of a 700 set. His bridge brain is entirely too undeveloped to have noticed any of your previous heroic work. Don't let this type of player discourage you from developing and perfecting such higher strategy if you can satisfy yourself that the ultimate outcome in the point score is in your favor.

I must lay great stress upon the fact that clever defensive bidding has nothing in common with so-called psychic bids. To try and disguise a worthless hand by bidding so as to fool the opponents is stupid and uncalled for. It has no place in contract bridge. It will never win in the long run, even if it worked once

during a session, and it will make you unpopular among other players. Many bridge instructors have warned you, and I most emphatically do the same: Learn to use the word "pass." Let it not disturb your fighting spirit. Remember, a clever pass is exactly the same as a clever bid or a clever double. When in doubt "pass."

I want you, furthermore, to remember that contract bidding should lead to a game-going contract, if possible, within the limit of the trick-taking potentialities of the combined hands, and after that slam possibilities should be considered. Your good bidding, and that of your partner, in arriving at the correct contract, are essential, but will be of no avail unless you know how to play cards. At least how to play so as not to lose any more tricks than necessary. Otherwise your whole structure of expert bidding goes for naught.

It is just that one extra trick which you fail to find, when the dummy comes down, which you need to make for your contract.

An important situation very often confronts you when you have come to the stage where you have to do one of three things: 1. Go on with your own or partner's bidding; 2. double the opponents' bid; or 3. pass. Which is the most advantageous? What will save or gain the most points in the end? There again your own experience counts. No bidding system will help you out. Years of play, good card sense (which is merely intelligent interest directed toward card

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playing), the study of the type of players you play with or against, and the ability to remember and recognize certain types or patterns of distribution (and remembering the average results obtained therewith) will make you a winning player.

Forcing Bids and Artificial Conventions

Certain bids under this heading have become so popular and universally used, that one must know them by heart, and know when to apply them, in order to understand one's partner and be understood by him.

A two-bid in a suit means: "Partner, I have at least 5½ honor tricks, and guarantee game in my hand, with slam possibilities." Or, "My two-suited hand is so strong that I can afford to shade the honor strength in telling you that I have a game-going hand, and am only trying to find out which of these two colors suits your hand the better."

Response: With very minimum, or no strength, bid two no-trump. With a long suit, without tops, bid two no-trump, and indicate this long suit on the next round of bidding, if the contract is not already too high to safely do so.

Some players want a positive response if you have one ace, and want you to name the suit of which you hold the ace.

I prefer somewhat better prospects in the hand, and would rather mention a four- or five-card suit in which I have some honor strength.

If the original bidder now follows with a game con-

tract or over, and very likely he will, you must now try to link your holdings with your partner's very strong hand, and you must now decide whether the contract should be carried to slam.

In these stages the Blackwood convention may be used, if the partnership has agreed upon it beforehand.

A two no-trump bid is usually termed a semi-forcing bid. It means: "Partner, my holdings and distribution would be more suited to playing the hand in no-trump than in a suit. I need very little from you to go game." It may also indicate four aces in the hand, with some additional strength, which will produce nine tricks for three no-trump, if your partner has some medium honor strength to fill the gaps. It is hoped that a three no-trump bid can be arrived at, to count the 150 points for the four aces.

Response: Unless you have a good biddable suit of your own, with honor strength, your response is three no-trump. If you have no strength at all, and no cards which you may count on to become of value in connection with your partner's holdings, you must pass. If you have a good, all-around hand, well distributed, you should suggest slam possibilities by bidding four no-trump.

OTHER FORCING BIDS

Another forcing bid, and at the same time an artificial convention, is an overcall of two in the same suit

as the opponents' bid of one, that is one more in the same suit as the opponents' bid.

For example, opponent on the right bids one heart. You overcall with two hearts. It means, "Partner, I have a very strong hand, divided in two or three good suits, and guarantee a quick, early protection against opponents' bid, by having no hearts at all, or having the ace alone, or perhaps king and one."

It is not, however, preferable as a first round direct overcall, and is more effectively used as a response to partner's bid or a re-bid of one's own strong hand.

Another artificial convention and forcing bid is the double of opponent's suit bid of one, before your own partner has made a call. It means: "Partner, I have a strong hand, with at least three or three-and-a-half honor tricks. Name your best suit, or no-trump, but you must not pass."

This same convention is often carried out against bids of two in a suit (not original two-bids), and occasionally of bids of three. In that event it becomes difficult for the partner to know whether the doubler means a business double or a double he wishes to be taken out of by his partner.

Another forcing opening bid and artificial convention is the one-club bid. This is not used as generally as others, and is usually announced beforehand by the partnership. It says: "Partner, I have honor strength and distribution that will very likely lead to a game bid. My hand is not powerful enough to make a two

bid, but it is much stronger than a minimum one bid."

The response is the same as to any other one bid. The partner may be somewhat freer in his tries for game than is the case ordinarily. It is usually a correct indication of distribution that is wanted. Always bear in mind that the strength in the opening hand is not necessarily in clubs and that that suit may even be negligible. The underlying principle of the bid is a means of giving partner an opportunity to make his response at the lowest level, and conduct the bidding in easy and careful stages, so that the best suit contract for the combined hands is arrived at. This rule is well to observe at all times, unless unusual strength or distribution in one of the two hands or both warrants early forcing bids.

The desire by the average player to come in with forcing bids is entirely too great.

If you have a good partner, a fairly shrewd player, you must remember that he doesn't need any such abrupt reminders to bid his cards and try for game. Give him a chance, and don't get into high bidding levels too fast. When you hold good cards, go easy. Get into the right contract by exchanging information at a low level.

There are certain times that you must make a forcing bid, but don't classify yourself with the strong no-trump bidder who seemingly gets so much satisfaction out of strong and powerful language.

Another forcing and purely artificial convention is

the so-called Blackwood convention. Often after game has been reached or definitely earmarked in certain suit or suits, and indications of small or large slam have become apparent, a four no-trump bid is made at the earliest opportunity, usually by the partner whose holdings indicate this possibility.

The response is as follows:

- 5 Clubs: "Partner, I have no aces."
- 5 Diamonds: "Partner, I have one ace."
- 5 Hearts: "Partner, I have two aces."
- 5 Spades: "Partner, I have three aces."

The original four no-trump bidder may now even drift into a five no-trump bid, to ask his partner for the showing of kings.

I should like to warn you against "slamitis," an ailment prevalent among bridge players. It develops into too much slam bidding, the desire to reach slam every time the bidding indicates strong holdings between the partnership. If you find that too many of your slam bids go haywire, or if you find that your handling of the cards doesn't warrant manipulating of difficult situations, you had better be satisfied with ordinary game bids and leave these risky slam bids for the gambler or more experienced card player.

And this goes for game bids too. Not every biddable hand or assist from partner calls for a game declaration. Part scores should never be neglected. They often provoke handsome penalties when the opposing side

is trying to prevent you from completing the unfinished game.

With the Blackwood convention a slam bid may be more accurately arrived at. Fortunately for the enjoyment of the game, the system has its flaws. It is confusing at times, when the combined strength is in a minor suit, and the slam should be arrived at in clubs or diamonds. Very often the level of bidding becomes too high to lay enough stress upon the minor suit's strength and possibilities. By applying the Blackwood convention regularly, for a certain length of time, you will observe for yourself these exceptions I speak of.

Yes, that is the Blackwood four no-trump and five no-trump convention. "Partner, my answer is five hearts." That means, "I have two aces in my hand." Now, is there any reason why, at this stage, you cannot ask, "By the way, partner, before going any further, how many aces have you?" And the answer is, "I have the ace of spades and the ace of diamonds." What is allowed for one side to do is allowed to the other side also. So, inasmuch as skill and guess work seemingly are not wanted, and one side has no advantage over the other, my method is even better than Blackwood's. You can get the information without getting into such a high level as a five bid and, by all means, we must not stop there.

If they are that good, and deadly sure, we must have

more of them. It is just as important to know more¹ about the rest of the partner's hand, kings, queens, etc., as well as length of suits, and so on. Why stop at six, when there is a sure seven.

In other words, let us eliminate and forbid these cut-and-dried conventions, and depend upon individual skill, or let's do the job more thoroughly, and make it foolproof. If you all felt as I do, and preferred the touch of the individual artist on the keyboard, instead of listening to a playerpiano, you would refuse to play anything like a Blackwood convention.

In the bidding, as well as in the play, it is skilful and most interesting to gauge values and locate certain cards and distributions without being told beforehand through artificial conventions.

Start off by keeping to the simple principle of bidding your cards as you see them yourself, and don't try to imitate tricky cue bids and the latest bidding novelties. Learn first to be sound, reliable, and safe.

There is one more bid I wish to speak of at length: the opening, strong, one-no-trump bid. Several years ago, when contract bridge had already been quite standardized as to playing rules and bidding conventions, somebody somewhere started it. It is a pity that his or her name has been somehow lost in the melee, and that it wasn't added to the list of immortals, the inventors of additional conventions, who have managed to make the game less skilful and therefore less interesting.

It took the public by storm. The less experienced and mediocre card player took it hook, line, and sinker. It meant a very strong hand, with at least 4 or 4½ honor tricks, which can be played at no-trump or any suit the partnership may prefer, after exchange of further information. Theoretically, there is nothing wrong with it. It is not an artificial convention, and quite natural in its conception.

Since then many players have changed their tactics and gone back to the so-called distributional no-trump, for which the requirements are not higher than any other opening bid, and a great many players, including myself, never adopted it.

Let us now analyze the two different bids as an opening bid. In all my playing and sitting in with various types of players, I have as yet to hear one good, substantial reason why, on the whole, the strong no-trump bid would show better results than the distributional one-no-trump bid. I did find that most all players, who lack expert card-playing ability and are not strong generally, find a great deal of satisfaction in announcing before the game starts: "Partner, I play a str-r-r-ong no-trump," rolling the "r" hard and long and thereby impressing upon themselves and partner that there is a certain strength about their game.

Prestige is even more firmly established by saying: "Partner, I play a str-r-r-ong no-trump and Blackwood." There, again, I would add, your winning pos-

sibilities will be perceptibly enhanced when the time comes that you can make the following announcement: "Partner, my bidding is not over-systemized. I follow the rather natural way of bidding my cards, according to the ever-changing situation, but I promise you that I will play my cards well, and not give away any more tricks than necessary. I am rather good in the execution of difficult hands."

The fact that you have announced a good, strong, all-around hand by bidding a strong no-trump is, perhaps, the only reason which could be given for it. But a no-trump bid, as a foundation to build upon, since it remains more or less mysterious as far as suit distribution is concerned, requires responses and further bidding at unnecessarily high levels.

Now, is there any reason whatsoever to mystify a very strong hand at the outset? Is there any reason why you should not lay your cards open on the table, and start a strong hand low and carefully, so that you will get the full benefit out of the nice cards you are holding? You are immediately in the driver's seat, without having to make your early plans on a semi-defensive basis.

By bidding what your opponents recognize as an initial strong one no-trump, you have definitely shut out the so-often disastrous overcall of two in a suit by your opponents, the bid that has resulted in more penalty points than any other.

You find yourself compelled, having declared your-

self as bidding a strong no-trump, to open one heart on four hearts to five-, six-, or seven-spot (if your hand is 3-3-3-4), while your three-suiters have enough high-card strength to justify an opening bid. This is decidedly unsound, and a bad foundation for the house to be built upon.

Let us now see what the facts are about an ordinary no-trump bid, which is usually termed a distributional no-trump. You hold from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ honor tricks. You have a well distributed hand with protection in at least three suits, or you have a hand with a long suit, which you could mention as a secondary bid, but which, played defensively, would produce very few or no tricks. Or your hand consists of such a combination of cards, that, with the help of your partner's cards, there are possibilities of a three no-trump result.

Advantages: Your partner is allowed to pass, unless he holds the same requirements for an assist as if a suit of one were made as an opening bid. If a quick three-no-trump bid can be arrived at, without disclosing suit strength and distribution, you are at a great advantage, as far as the defense of your opponents is concerned. The opening lead is made blindly and, regardless of how good the player is, unless an overcall was made by his partner, he has to do some guessing. Very often he guesses wrong, and you have gained the all-important factor in a no-trump play—"the timing of the hand." This guesswork will continue more or less during the entire play. There will be no ruffing;

any set-up card is an ace. I do not claim that the defense of suit bids doesn't call for expert play and good strategy but, on the whole, the defender will have a much better picture of the combined hands after suit-distribution bids have been exchanged by the partnership.

It is my opinion that when you are confronted with an ultimate game bid, in many cases the three no-trump contract (the shortest way to game) will win over the four in a major bid, if there is an apparent choice between the two, and if the bid can be foreseen early, without exchanging too much information for the benefit of the defending players.

The regular one-no-trump bid has other advantages. The opponents, knowing that you don't bid the so-called strong no-trump, will very often try to find an overcall, so that they may not be shut out by an early mediocre, semi-defensive bid. But there are many times, of course, that your no-trump bid is somewhat better than a minimum, or that your partner is in the picture too, and it is in these instances that you provoke penalties, sometimes considerable ones, penalties that are never to be got through a strong no-trump bid.

There are other advantages. Regardless of how the opposing players will tell you that they are not concerned by your semi-defensive style of bidding, there will always be a feeling of some hidden strength in your hand. This goes for two opponents, and the

chances of holding them within the desired limits in their final bid are in your favor.

Another reason: You have opened the bidding with one no-trump. Your hand is of minimum strength. The final contract goes to the opponents. In the play of the cards, the declarer, regardless of how clever a player he is, will frequently have difficulties in placing the higher and medium cards, and you have thereby created a certain amount of defense during the play of the hand.

To sum up: When the time has come that you feel free to do a little defensive bidding of your own, you will enjoy the careful handling of the distributional no-trump as a flexible semi-defensive weapon.

We have now come to the so-called pre-emptive shut-out bids of three or more.

An original bid of three in clubs or diamonds should mean: "Partner, I can only play the hand for a part score in this suit, and am trying, by making my bid as high as possible, to shut out opponents' declaration, or make it at least as difficult as possible for them to exchange information at a low level. Offensively I am through, and could perhaps bid one more, with a chance of making that much, or go down one or two tricks to offset opponents' gain if they play the hand. Against opponents' play of the contract, my hand will produce very few or no tricks."

The responding hand should be very careful in handling these three-in-a-minor opening bids. Unless

you have a good solid suit, which you can play yourself without depending upon partner's hand, you had better get out of the running. If you have some good assist in the suit mentioned, and side cards as well, a game bid may be arrived at, either in five-in-the-minor or three no-trump.

An original bid of four in the minor suits would mean about the same, except that it has far greater possibilities to produce a game declaration than the three bid. It tells your partner: "Partner, I am only good to play the hand in my declared suit, but need very little in your hand to go game."

In response the partner should not hesitate in helping to five if he has some top cards. Trumps are not needed.

The difference between the original three bid and the original four bid in the minor suits is much greater than the bids would indicate. The three bid is an expression of weakness and defense. The four bid strongly suggests offense and the reaching of game.

Three and four bids in the major suits (hearts and spades), as opening bids, are of course quite different. There seems to be a difference in methods among good players as to when and how to use these bids. Some of them will use the three bids as bust bids, saying the same as in the minor, with the exception that the responding hand need only give one assist to be in game contract. It is well to inquire beforehand if the player uses these bids as semi-defensive bust bids.

Other players mean a really strong hand, needing only very little assist to go game. They only wish to express unusual length in the suit they bid, perhaps six or seven cards. But in any case, so far as they are concerned, the hand should play in the suit indicated. Thus the responding hand, with one ace and one king in another suit, or any other average help, may go to four without hesitation, and trump support in his hand is of less importance than in other bidding situations.

The original bid of four is easy to handle. It means: "Partner, my hand will produce a game in the suit I bid, if you have an ordinary hand, with normal expectancy; I cannot play it in any other suit because mine is at least seven cards in length. I am stretching the bid somewhat to a game bid, at the same time making it difficult for the opponents to enter the bidding at this high level. If you are blank, the worst that can happen to us is that we take a small set against a part score or game bid of the opponents, for which we would have little defense."

Do not respond unless unusually strong and slam possibilities are imminent.

An original bid of five in a minor suit means practically the same as a four bid in a major suit, except for the fact that it has probably less defensive values than the major suit bids. It is not an invitation for a slam bid. Be careful, these pre-emptive bids are stretched already. Remember, however, there isn't

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such a thing as a shut-out bid, as far as the partner is concerned. If you think you have the cards to go further, you may increase any bid your partner makes.

PREFERENCE BIDS

When your partner has given you bids in two or more suits, and your holdings do not warrant over-calls or assisting bids, you are invited to make a preference bid at such time when you have a chance to do so without increasing the bidding level.

Your partner, provided, of course, that he knows himself what he is doing, will not consider your bid as a positive response or strength bid and merely accept it as your information as to which suit fits in best with your hand.

Doubling

Before closing this chapter on contract bidding, I want to lay stress once more upon certain phases of it.

Any time that you and your partner arrive at a final contract whereby you gain the most, or lose the least points in the end, you have done thoughtful and clever bidding.

Any time that you have held your opponents to such a contract, which is the least disadvantageous to your side, you are doing equally well.

Try to be accurate in your calculations at certain times, whether it pays to double the opponents or, by going on with your own bidding you hope to gain more points.

Now for a more definite conception of the meaning of doubling low contracts by your partner: the one or two bids—when to leave the double in—when to take out. In rubber bridge games of the average club and society players, there is too much uncertainty about this subject.

Definition: When either you or your partner has bid, and your partner now doubles the opponent's less-

than-a-game bid, his double must be accepted by you as a so-called business double. Only in such cases when your holdings and distribution seem to spell disaster is it advisable to divert your partner's decision, and if you are convinced that your further bidding and ultimate final contract will net you more points and a more advantageous position in the end, the take-out of your partner's business double is also justified. These phases of the auction must be well studied and a timely understanding with a strange partner is recommended. It seems to me that too many arguments and costly misunderstandings arise about this point at the bridge table.

In calculating how many tricks the partnership can make, always try to figure out how many tricks you are liable to lose, and this will help you so much, especially in the higher range of bidding, and in slam bidding.

Many inexperienced players make the fatal error of doubling the adversaries' contract when they are wholly unprepared to double the next bid, which robs them of the opportunity of defeating the opponents' contract undoubled.

Another very bad habit adhered to by the novice is to double a game contract on general principles, because it calls for a game anyway. Very often the declarer has an opportunity to redouble; the gamble is entirely in his favor, and overtricks, especially when

vulnerable, will accumulate a handsome score above the line.

Think before you act. Don't let your fighting mood get the better of you. Sober, careful calculation is the watchword. Remember the chess game, which I refer to in the following paragraph.

And now, one more bit of advice about contract bidding, that has never been mentioned in books on bidding systems: You all know the game of chess, even if you have not played it yourselves. Well, contract-bridge bidding has one thing in common with chess. Every time you make a move (a bid or a pass or a double), you must try to figure out the next move by your opponents or partner. In other words, if I do so and so, what are my opponents likely to do, and then what will my partner do; and if my opponents or my partner does the other thing, what will be my next move? There is some nice practice for you. The more accurately you can figure this out, and the farther ahead you can foresee certain moves all around the table, the better strategist you will become, and the less of the various bidding systems you have to absorb.

One more suggestion to the player who wishes to become better than just an average player: Try to have a flexible mind, and never forget that there are two phases of contract bidding—offensive bidding and de-

fensive bidding. When you or your partner opens the bidding, even with a seemingly fairly strong hand, you never know whether you or your opponents are going to play the final contract. As the bidding proceeds, you will find out quickly enough how the land lies, and you should always be prepared, when the attack fails, to put up the best possible defense. As said before, if you are clever enough to foresee such an event, and formulate your early bids accordingly, and with a certain amount of safety to exit, you will soon rise above the ranks of the average player.

I am quite convinced that most of the general run of bridge players have a good many things to worry about before they feel free to venture into the realm of mixing their offensive bids with those defensive touches I have dwelt upon. But do try at least to understand some of the logic your more enterprising partner has in his mind when such bidding as follows develops:

Your partner deals and passes. Opponents bid one spade, on the right of your partner. Your partner now overcalls with three hearts. It is plain that he is on the defensive, and is not asking you to accept his bid as a forcing bid.

Your partner opens with one no-trump (not vulnerable); the adversary (vulnerable) on his left bids two hearts. You pass, and the other adversary, on his right, now bids two spades, whereupon your partner follows with three clubs. Has it not already occurred to you that your partner's opening bid of one no-

trump had a strong defensive flavor, and that you had better stay out of the bidding unless you have something worth while to show?

The opponent (vulnerable) opens with one heart. Your partner (not vulnerable) overcalls with two no-trump. The opponents bid three hearts. Your partner bids four clubs. Now, at this stage, doesn't it occur to you that his first two-no-trump bid was very much influenced by defensive thoughts? If his hand was that strong, as he tried to make it seem, couldn't he much better have doubled the opponent's bid of one, and try to find out if you had anything to suit his hand? And why, if he had such a strong hand, didn't he overcall in the suit or suits he was strong in, instead of mystifying matters to you? I would say you had better stay out of the fray, and don't come into the bidding at all, unless you are convinced that you can do better than he is doing. He has quite definitely shown that he intends to handle the situation alone.

You have opened the bidding with one heart. Your partner responds with one spade. You have good spade support, and bid two spades. Your partner rebids three clubs, and you bid three spades; your partner four clubs. Now, has it not by this time become clear to you that your partner was somewhat worried about an overcall of spades by the opponents, and tried to prevent it by an early defense? His hand cannot be very strong—he doesn't want spades, he cannot help

your hearts, but he says he is good enough to play it in clubs. So be careful; try to understand. This same one-spade or one-heart bid may be used by your partner, if you open the bidding with one in the minor suits, and your partner, thereafter, regardless of your response, helps you in your own minor suit, one at a time.

Now, his hand must be very weak defensively. He only hopes to play it in your mentioned minor suit, at the lowest possible contract, or to round out a part score.

The last one-in-the-major-suit bids by your partner, as above described, are purely psychic. I do not particularly advocate them for you to use, but I am trying to warn you, and have you acquaint yourself with them, in case you suddenly are confronted by them through an aggressive partner.

As you might have observed from the preceding pages, it is my firm belief that an aggressive style of bidding will win over timid and conservative tactics, and when you feel that you can manipulate your cards as well as the next average player, you should not hesitate to adopt a pushing style and keep the other fellow on his toes all the time.

Before ending this chapter on contract bridge bidding, I must call your attention once more to the fact that the difference in contract bidding at rubber bridge and at duplicate play is far greater than the average player realizes. In duplicate each hand is a

match. If you arrive at a six-spade contract, and score 180 points plus bonus, and all the other teams arrive at a six-no-trump contract and score 190 points plus bonus, you are awarded a bottom score. In the rubber game you have lost ten points, and perhaps you had honors in spades, and gained by it.

In the rubber game you played the hand in three diamonds, giving you 60 points, whereas you could have set the opponents' bid three tricks for 150 points. In duplicate you receive bottom score, in the rubber game your part score, vulnerable, leads to two or three juicy sets against opponents who, on the next hand, are trying to prevent you from going game for a 700-point bonus.

So, I commence to believe more and more that these deadly conventions we hear of are mainly created for the duplicate players who feel that they must squeeze out the maximum points for each hand. In building up games and rubbers, and in the meantime devoting plenty of attention to the penalty score, these situations are so manifestly different that rubber-bridge bidding and duplicate-bridge bidding are quite far apart.

Look at it this way. In duplicate you can pick up your cards, and you are now called upon to attend to one single transaction, very often against strange opponents whose tactics and qualifications you have had no chance to study. The outcome of this piece of business is final and binding, and may give you the

very highest honors or the most disgraceful disillusion. A ten-point difference makes you a master or an also-ran.

In rubber bridge these things don't make so much difference, but other things do. Each hand you bid and play is a part of a structure you are building. The hand you bid and play is part of the things to follow, and the hands which follow are part of the previous transactions.

A smart player will use certain tactics with or against players in one rubber which he could not think of applying with another partner or against other opponents. I have seen tricky players go so far as to refuse willfully to bid for game, in the hope of extracting more profitable penalties in the long run from the poor team they were playing against. That surely would come under the heading of poor etiquette, and luckily such methods are sporadic. The reason I mention it here is to bring out the great difference in contract bridge bidding at rubber and at duplicate play.

It would be well to add right here that a great deal of expert strategy may be developed in the ultimate earning or frustration of rubber bonuses.

Every player, even the newcomer, has been immediately confronted with these intricacies of the rubber game.

The question how far one might go to prevent the first game by the opposing side, the importance of

preventing part score by vulnerable opponents, the advisability of being content with a part-score bid against the risk of doubtful-game bid, the point where a minimum holding will warrant an opening bid to complete part score, in the expectation of vigorous interference by adversaries: All these situations require good judgment and lots of experience, and are closely related to the art of defensive bidding as previously dwelt upon.

The Play of the Hand

I must admit at the outset that I wouldn't know how to teach you, in writing, how to play cards. Voluminous books have been written on the subject. One of the best that I know of is Watson's *Play of the Hand*. It was never my intention to present you with one of those volumes which you perhaps would start with a certain vigor, but soon would lay aside. For the inexperienced player and the average amateur it is too much of a study. You would find yourself coping with hundreds of intricate combinations and freak distributions.

In your case, actual practice and sitting in with all kinds of players, good, bad, and indifferent, will do more for you. The best school here is the school of experience.

It seems to be a proven fact that some people have what is called a natural card sense. They will learn quickly, and see the why and wherefore. They will become good card players in a short time, and some of them will eventually enter the ranks of the experts.

Others do not possess this natural gift. They will have to content themselves, after a long, long time,

with being classified as fair. Some of them, I am sorry to state, will never learn it.

I will, however, endeavor to give you some helpful hints on the play of your thirteen cards—fragments of my own experience over a very long period. I will try to be simple and understandable, and not tire you with endless examples and problems, so that you may read and study this little book to the end, and not lay it aside. I don't want to hear you say, after a few pages: "Ah, this is too much for me, I can't be bothered. After all, I never intended to be a professional. Come on, let's have a game."

I even go so far as to hope that you will look in it once in a while after reading it.

My first advice is to play with better players than yourself, whenever you can. The best chance to improve your game is to watch an expert player, sit behind him as often and as long as you can, and follow his moves. He may even be willing to answer a question or two at the proper time. Don't consider such a practical, free bridge lesson as a loss of time.

When the bidding is over, and the play of the cards commences, you have to play in an offensive or defensive position.

I shall speak of the offensive play first, that is, when you are the declarer and have to make good your final contract, or as near thereto as possible.

After the opening lead has been made by your opponent at the left, your dummy goes down. You will

now have the right, and it is to your advantage, to be slow and careful. Don't let anybody hurry you. Analyze the cards, see how they fit in with your own hand. If there was any bidding by the opposing side, you take that into account, and from their bidding, and as the play proceeds, you must try to place the cards. You have a distinct advantage, inasmuch as you can see your twenty-six partnership cards plainly before you, whereas the opposing players have to guess about their partner's hand.

The first thing confronting you very often, when you have studied the dummy, is the fact that you can plainly see certain tricks you are going to make. Your contract is four. You count nine tricks, but where is the tenth? You are in a contract of three. Yes, again you see eight tricks very plainly, but you have contracted for nine. That is contract bridge for you. Your opponents were clever enough to push you up to the limit of your strength, and very often over that, and in many cases you and your partner have voluntarily stretched the hands yourselves in order to reach a game contract. Sometimes, when you are vulnerable, the opposing side can well afford to push their own cards for a reasonable set against your earnings, a game bonus of 700 points.

To be more precise, the majority of the hands you play are no lay-downs. They have to be played, and you have to produce that extra trick which you cannot

see plainly when the play begins. Now, you may take the following for granted:

The expert player will know how to make that doubtful trick, nine out of ten times, if it is to be made at all.

The average player will make it occasionally, depending much upon luck or bad defense.

The inexperienced player will never make it.

Let us accept the theory that cards average themselves throughout the years, and you will readily see that you had better learn to play cards well, if you want to become a winning player, because the value of that extra trick is so great that it usually decides the whole issue. How often, when you lost that trick, which would have gained a 700 bonus (rubber for you), did it happen that your opponents got busy, won the rubber, and you lost, let us say, a ten-point rubber, whereas you should have won a ten-point rubber? The difference is double, and your loss is twenty points.

I so often observe that players lose interest in the game when cards are running badly. They seem to take the attitude, "Let's get this game over with—nothing to be done about it—maybe the next deal the aces and kings will come in again."

That is indeed a great fallacy and will never make you a good player.

Such is the time to be doubly careful and watch the

drop of the cards, because intermediate or small cards will often decide the issue and it is far better practice, for improving your game, to handle poor hands skillfully than just to slap down aces and kings. Remember, the big cards take care of themselves, the small ones need special nursing.

When you play the hand in a suit bid, you must decide whether you can afford to lead trumps until your opponents' trumps are exhausted, or whether you must use some of your trump strength first for ruffing losing cards in either hand, or play entirely on a cross-ruffing basis, and use trumps in both hands without dropping them together.

You must try to foresee whether opponents' early leads are earmarked as singletons or doubletons, and intended to establish a ruff of one of your high or set-up cards. Sometimes there is no way of preventing this, but you must be on your guard against it.

The inexperienced player loves to make finesses, leading into a tenace in the dummy or his own hand. When it works he feels a great deal of satisfaction, and usually looks up to his partner for a glance of admiration. If it goes wrong, he cannot help it—just another finesse went wrong.

Yes, finesses must be taken at times, perhaps quite frequently, and especially when a long suit is to be established early in the play. But the shrewder player doesn't take any finesses, unless he has to, and it

actually benefits his line of strategy. On the contrary, he will very often let his opponents attend to that business, because he knows that whenever he can throw the opponents into the lead, and have the play come up to his hand or the dummy, there is a marked advantage in locating and cashing in on intermediate cards. This holds good all through the play, but is especially of great importance towards the end, when only three or four cards are left, so that the opposing player, who is thrown into the lead, is forced to lead into the player's tenace. This expert play is called an end play. A very simple example of it follows:

There are three cards left. In the dummy you have a small diamond and the AQ of clubs. Your opponent on the right has the high remaining diamond and the KJ of clubs. You play the diamond from your hand or from the dummy, and your opponent is now forced to lead from the KJ of clubs into the AQ of clubs. Had you taken an early finesse in clubs, the king on your right would have taken the trick, whereas you now make both ace and queen. The same result is obtained if the A2 in clubs were held in declarer's hand and the Q3 in dummy's hand or Ax is in dummy and Qx in declarer's hand.

Another method used by the expert is the so-called squeeze play. You play all the cards of a long trump suit, or other suit or both, until one of your opponents, having protection in two or three suits which haven't

been played, must let go of winning cards or cards which he needs to protect his winning cards, and in that way you often gain one or more tricks in your weaker suits. Again, had you taken unnecessary early finesses in your weaker suits, you would have lost tricks which now fall in your lap.

A very simple example: There are four cards to play. Your opponent has left the K10 of spades and the K9 of hearts. Both aces of these suits are still in, and now the declarer leads another diamond, perhaps the last of a long suit. One of the small protecting cards in opponent's hand must now be discarded, usually to the advantage of the declarer. These so-called squeeze plays, which are worked out to a great extent by the expert card player, will result in the queerest and most embarrassing situations of double and triple squeezes. The opposing player may have to let go of positively set-up cards in his hand to protect other cards, with which he hopes to take a trick, and even then he may guess wrong.

Another method of the strategist, to cash in on doubtful tricks, is the so-called elimination or strip play. Two or three suits are entirely eliminated from both dummy and your own hand. The opponent is now thrown in so that he is compelled to lead into your suit with the tenace, in which you intend to make the doubtful trick. If he doesn't, but leads one of the suits which you have stripped from both hands, you can trump in one hand and discard a losing card from the

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other, which is equally to your advantage. The play is somewhat similar to the above described end play, but it can be made at any time during the game.

PASSING UP A TRICK

When establishing a suit in a hand short in re-entries, it is often better to give away a trick in that suit on the first, and frequently even on the second round, rather than take the chance of playing for the break.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNBLOCKING

In the matter of unblocking and keeping the lead in the hand with the greatest number of a suit, you must always be on your guard. Many a declaration is lost by an unwary declarer who gets himself blocked, and hence is unable to cash winning cards in the other hand. It is the opponent's job to block you if and when he can, and you must watch your step to keep from falling into the trap which he sets for you.

THE TIMING OF THE PLAY

Speaking on this subject, one may as well call it the proper play of the hand because it means that certain suits and cards of that suit should be played at the proper time. By improper execution and faulty rotation, the player misses certain opportunities to set up cards, to get in his ruffs properly, or to throw in the opponents for leads to his advantage—he loses the

timing (the tempo) of the hand. And no need to say that it is the adversaries' business to watch the clock and spoil the timing or proper execution whenever they can.

The importance of having the play come into your hand or dummy's:

By playing your sure losers first and having the play come up to you into combinations which you want to develop, so that they will produce the best results for you, you will invariably gain.

Only novices play out all their winning cards in a row, and trust to luck for the rest. Unless there is nothing to be gained by throwing in the opponents, and no doubtful cards to be developed, or, in cases where you, by relinquishing the lead, would lose the timing of the hand, as above pointed out, is this method excusable.

Counting down opponents' holdings:

The expert card player is constantly engaged in ascertaining the distribution of the cards he is playing against. He remembers the bidding, he sees the dummy and his own thirteen cards. The fall of the cards will do much to help him calculate, and in difficult situations he will watch every angle and figure his best average chances.

If you cannot keep track of all the suits and cards played, try to memorize such cards and suits which are the most important to win or defeat a contract. There are always certain cards or finesses for certain cards

which will decide the issue. They are called key-cards.

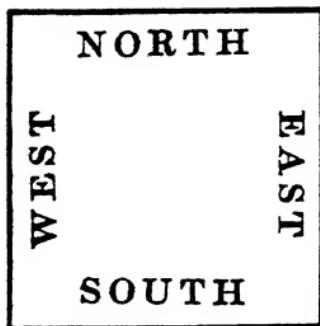
This is all very difficult. There is much to watch, and even more to remember. Don't try to do too much at once, but try to improve your card playing right along. It is a beautiful and interesting study, and once you see yourself commencing to squeeze out that extra trick now and then, you will feel the real thrill of contract bridge—a thrill and satisfaction that is yours—quite different from fitting cards into Mr. Jones' bidding system, or shouting the latest artificial convention which you just noticed this morning being reprinted on the back of your laundry bill.

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SIMPLE EXAMPLE OF *END PLAY*, ALSO CALLED
THROW-IN PLAY

♠ 7-2
♥ A-Q
♦ A-K-8-6-2
♣ 8-6-3-2

♠ Q-J-9-6-4
♥ 8-3-2
♦ 10-5
♣ K-J-10



♠ 8-5-3
♥ J-10-7-6
♦ J-9-4
♣ 9-7-4

♠ A-K-10
♥ K-9-5-4
♦ Q-7-3
♣ A-Q-5

The contract is 6 no-trump.

1. West leads queen of spades, which is taken by declarer's king.
2. Declarer follows with 4 of hearts and takes the trick in dummy with the ace.
3. Queen of hearts from dummy to which each one follows.
4. The deuce of diamonds is led from dummy and taken in South's hand with the queen.

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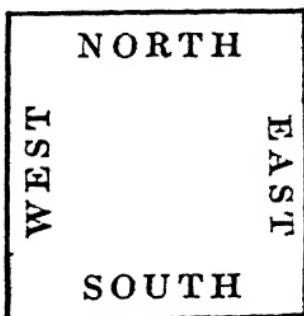
5. Diamond 3 from declarer—takes with ace in dummy.
6. Follows with diamond king from dummy.
7. Diamond 8 from dummy. Declarer discards club 5 from own hand.
8. Diamond 6 from dummy—discards heart 9.
9. Spade from dummy to ace in own hand.
10. Heart king from own hand, which leaves West with 3 following cards—jack of spades and king and jack of clubs.
11. West is now thrown in with the jack of spades and finds himself end played and being forced to concede the last two tricks to declarer.

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SIMPLE EXAMPLE OF SQUEEZE PLAY

♦ K-J-7
♥ K-9-7
♦ Q-9-7-6
♣ A-9-5

♦ A
♥ Q-J-10-4
♦ A-K-8-5-2
♣ Q-6-3



♦ 10-9-8-6-5
♥ 8-5-3-2
♦ J-4-3
♣ 7

♦ Q-4-3-2
♥ A-6
♦ 10
♣ K-J-10-8-4-2

The contract is 5 clubs doubled.

1. Diamond king is led and taken by West.
2. Spade ace is taken by West.
3. West leads queen of hearts, which is taken by declarer's ace.
4. Declarer now leads club jack and finesse. The jack holds.
5. He now follows with club 2, which is cashed in the dummy with the 9.
6. Club ace from dummy.
7. Spade king from dummy.

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8. Spade jack from dummy, taken by queen in South's hand.
9. Club 10 from declarer's hand.
10. Club 8 from declarer's hand.
11. Club king from declarer's hand.

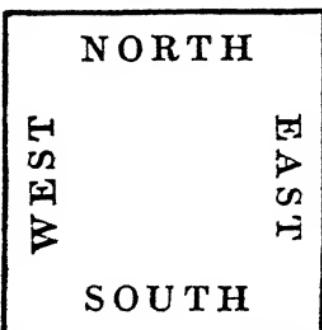
Here is where the squeeze comes in. If West lets go of the ace of diamonds, dummy will make balance of tricks. If West lets go of 10 of hearts, dummy will likewise make two last tricks.

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SIMPLE EXAMPLE OF *STRIP* OR *ELIMINATION PLAY*

♠ A-J-3
♥ A-K
♦ A-J-4
♣ J-10-8-7-4

♠ K-7-4
♥ J-10-9-8
♦ Q-9-8
♣ Q-6-3



♠ 10-9-8
♥ Q-7-4-3-2
♦ 10-7-6-5-2
♣ -

♠ Q-6-5-2
♥ 6-5
♦ K-3
♣ A-K-9-5-2

The contract is 6 clubs.

1. West leads jack of hearts, which is taken in dummy by the king.
2. Jack of clubs is led from dummy which reveals that East is void of clubs and the trick is taken by king in declarer's hand.
3. The king of diamonds is now led and trick taken by South.
4. 3 of diamonds to dummy's ace.
5. Jack of diamonds by dummy and ruffed by South.

6. 6 of hearts to dummy's ace.

The dummy is now stripped of hearts and diamonds and

7. A small club is led from the North position which declarer cashes with the ace.
8. At this time another small club is played by declarer which West is obliged to take with the queen.

This ends the story because whatever card is now led by the defending West position will result in declarer's taking the rest of the tricks.

9. If a heart is led, the 7 of spades is discarded from dummy, declarer's hand entered with a trump and the tenace in spades assures all the remaining tricks.
10. If a spade is led by West, declarer lets it come up to his own hand, cashing the trick with the queen and the spade finesse will do the rest.

Defensive Play

Each time that your opponents play the contract, you are called upon to play your cards defensively. That means, to try with the help of your partner to set the contract or to hold the declarer to the least possible tricks. On the whole, this requires far greater skill than the offensive play.

This department of the game is extremely important, particularly when you are holding poor cards and playing in hard luck at the same time. By good defensive play, you may hold your losses to a minimum. There are not enough thought and study given to defensive play by the average player. Good defensive play admittedly is difficult but, as above mentioned, it is the measure of a good bridge player.

THE OPENING LEAD

Your opening lead frequently determines the outcome of the hand. After the opening lead has been made and dummy goes down, you should make a careful survey of the dummy's cards, and plan your campaign of defense just as carefully as the declarer maps out his offensive. And, like declarer, you should watch

the fall of the cards, and modify your original plan of action to meet the information contained in the play of the cards. If you have no indication from the bidding what your opening lead should be, do not trust to luck only. Try to visualize the holding of your partner and declarer, or make your leads to conserve tenaces in your own hand.

At no-trump declaration a good lead is your fourth best of your longest suit (Rule of Eleven), unless the bidding has indicated that your partner wishes a certain specific suit or card led. It does frequently happen that the declarer and his partner's bidding has given you a hint where their weakness lies, or rather where the hands don't fit, and all these details have to be taken into account.

Don't concentrate too much upon your own cards and your original plan of action. Remember your partner. Give heed to his plays and signals. Watch his "high, low" and his discards. Follow up what your partner conveys to you through his plays. Beware of the declarer when he tries to make you play into his hand and dummy. Fight him with his own weapons. Watch your so-called "get-out" cards, and remember what I have said in regard to tenaces. This goes for low tenaces as well as honor cards.

' Make a study of when to cover an honor with an honor and when not to.

In suit declarations it is often profitable to lead singletons or short suits, in order to cash in otherwise

useless small trumps in your hand, and you should be watchful whether your partner, in his opening lead or at any other time during the play, has such tactics in mind. On the other hand, if this part of the attack fails, and the declarer is able to take out your trumps before you are able to ruff, it is usually very disastrous, because it has enabled the declarer to set up his long suit or doubtful cards early; and often before you were able to set up your own good cards. You have, in that case, lost the timing.

It is well to remember the following: In echoing for a come-on or lead of certain suit wanted, don't waste high cards or even cards of lesser denomination if they may become trick-taking values. Only when quick action is required will this be recommended. As a rule, you may indicate your position much better by discarding low cards from the suit or suits which you don't want led. As said before, intelligent partners need no bombshells from you to follow the right course of defense.

May I give you another very confidential tip in defending your cards? Try as much as you can to anticipate the leads and plays of your opponents—in other words, don't find yourself in the embarrassing position, when it becomes your turn to play, of having to make decisions which plainly suggest doubt or even fumbling. Mr. Goodplayer is watching you and is trying to locate certain cards. Your hesitation or inde-

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cision may net him that extra trick which he needs to make his contract.

This again refers to the chess player's mind and is by no means easy. Try to acquire as many of these expert tactics as you can.

THE ART OF FALSE CARDING

This is another department of the game which comes under the heading of higher strategy.

Offensively it can be done, misleading only your opponents, but if you venture into this style of defense you must be careful, just as in the bidding, that your side isn't harmed by it more than the declarer. When you play or discard such cards which may deceive declarer as to your actual holding or distribution and thereby defeat the contract or gain otherwise, and you are able to do this without upsetting your partner's technique too much, you will experience the thrill of real card playing.

Play in even tempo, not too hastily, so that when the time comes that you need a moment to think it over before you bid or play nothing unnatural or hesitating may be observed by the other players.

It so often happens that unusual tardiness suggests stalling or breach of etiquette, and you will avoid this embarrassment by adopting a leisurely style without being slow.

In the play much depends upon the distribution of

the cards, previous bidding, your partner's signals as the play develops and, of course, "luck and the breaks of the cards" always play an important part. The longer you practice playing a good defense, the better chance you have to acquire some of those unexplainable winning touches, which the seasoned player brings into play—the glorious knack of doing the right thing at the right moment, which you, up to now, have attributed to just pure luck of the other fellow.

The Code of Etiquette

This is such an important factor to promote a smooth and pleasant session of bridge, and unfortunately so constantly abused. As in any other game, there are different classes of players: good, bad, mediocre, and excellent. Very often players cannot be evenly matched, and each player must be willing to accept his partner and his ability as a player, and thereby assist in making the game a pleasant recreation all around.

Remember, people play cards for a pastime. That same player, whose intelligence you challenge by your undue criticism, may be by far your master in golf or dominoes.

Do not criticize the bids or play while the game is in progress. There is no offense in exchanging thoughts and suggestions after the hands are played, and up to the time the next deal is completed.

Do not call attention to the score during the bidding, or ask for a review of the bidding with the intent of drawing your partner's attention to certain specific phases of the bidding.

No emphasis should be given in speech or gesture

to bids, passes, or doubles. This holds good also during the play of the cards.

The best definition of the above is: One should want to feel the satisfaction that nothing was said or done intentionally to influence the other players' decision, outside of the regular procedure of bidding and playing the cards.

Do not touch or pull a card from your hand until it actually has become your turn to play. Do not pull one card first, and then play another, with the intention of misleading your opponents.

Do not try to conceal a revoke by renegeing a second time in the same suit.

Do not reach for the cards played on the table until all four cards have been played, and it has become a fact that the trick is won by your side.

Do not stand behind your partner, watching him play a hand.

If you are inclined to be talkative, try to restrain yourself while playing bridge.

If you are musically inclined, try to do your whistling or humming away from the card table.

Do not leave the table more often than is necessary.

Do not start to pick up your cards before the deal is completed.

Hold up your cards so that you are the only one at the table who sees them. It is good etiquette *not* to lead the other fellow into temptation.

Try to refrain from too much complaining when the

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luck is against you, and by all means don't exult in the fact that you are a better player than others or hold better cards.

Place the still pack, after shuffling, at your right. It is good etiquette to watch and remember when it is your turn to deal or make up the still deck. There are players who always nervously grab for something, either the cards just played with or the deck to deal with. Save your energy. You will remember this from my lesson dealing with concentration.

Treat your partner gently and praise him occasionally. Your reward will be twofold; not only will you be setting an example of good etiquette, but the all-around results will be decidedly in your favor.

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